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THE

METAPHYSICAL MIRACLES

REV. G. F. SMITH

600099105U

Among the Authors and Celebrities referred to or quoted in this volume, are the following:—

Houdin,—Herodotus,—Wm. Howitt,—Ritual Commission,—Kitto,—Burgon,—Rev. John Lamb, Hulsean Lecturer,—Pfenninger,—Right Hon. Robt. Lowe,—Mr. Lyne (Father Ignatius),—Baden Powell,—Melvill,—Disraeli,—Archbp. Trench,—Josephus,—Lightfoot,—Shelley,—Author of "Ecce homo,"—J. H. Newman,—Renan,—Strauss,—Paulus,—Schenkel,—Dr. Johnson,—Professor Huxley.

ERRATUM.

At page 7, for *optician*, read *oculist*.

600099105U

8000

METAPHYSICAL MIRACLES.

The

Metaphysical Miracles

of the New Testament,

COLLECTED AND CONSIDERED MAINLY WITH REFERENCE TO THE DOCTRINE OF HUME THAT NO AMOUNT OF TESTIMONY CAN BE CREDITED AGAINST THE FIXITY OF NATURE'S LAWS,

BY

THOMAS FREDERICK SMITH, B.D.,

RECTOR OF HORSINGTON, LINCOLNSHIRE, AND FORMERLY FELLOW OF MAGDALEN COLLEGE, OXFORD.

"It is very easy to talk about the shallow impostures, and the silly, ignorant sophisms of Voltaire, Rousseau, Condorcet, D'Alembert, and Volney, and to say that Hume is not worth answering; *the affectation of contempt will not do.*"—SYDNEY SMITH.

LONDON:
WILLIAM SKEFFINGTON 163, PICCADILLY.

1871.

101. g. 488.

LONDON:
W. H. Hodge, Steam Printer, Black Horse Yard,
Rathbone Place, w.

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT.

THE possibility of mistaking a trick for a miracle must be obvious to every one who has witnessed the marvellous deceptions accomplished by conjurors and jugglers. In Houdin's celebrated memoirs a spirited description is given of the manner in which his marvellous feats in sleight of hand did more to overawe the wild Arabs of Algeria than all the military resources of his country. He was, in fact, employed professionally by the French Government as a miracle-worker, to impose on a people whose inborn love of liberty had hitherto baffled every other mode of assault.

If, then, legerdemain may pass itself off as miraculous it must always be apprehended that there may be a considerable resemblance between a false and a true miracle; and this possible resemblance may perhaps afford the true solution of our Lord's repeated charge, "See thou tell no man." The possessors of genuine attainments, gifts, or powers are acutely sensitive of being weighed in the same scales with pretenders, quacks, or mountebanks, and "see thou tell no man" admits of

being paraphrased, "Save me from the sneers of this generation, let futurity reveal the truth."

This possibility of being imposed upon is the fulcrum upon which Hume, and most impugners of miracles have placed their levers; take away this fulcrum and they could no more upset the faith in miracles than Archimedes could move the earth.

The exhibitor of wonders, or thaumaturgist, may employ mechanical deception, as when he works with sleight of hand upon previously prepared apparatus; or he may use spiritual deception assigning results to wrong causes, and making believe that a sick person has been cured by Divine power when really nature in the ordinary course has produced the cure under the influence, perhaps, of some strong emotion of the mind; and thirdly there is the deception of which the Jews were so suspicious, and which belongs specially to their history, that *viz*: whereby Satan himself might palm off upon them works of his own for works of God. We have seen how fatally this suspicion operated against their conversion and salvation—suspicions of other kinds may not work perhaps so fatally in the present day, but they account for the readiness with which the shallow arguments against miracles, (meaning by the word

"miracle" a result produced by supernatural cause) are taken up and circulated.

It is true that Hume's argument defies refutation, not indeed from its soundness but from its unsoundness, its essence being that it is easier to believe all men liars than that nature's laws should be suspended by supernatural interference; so that the cogency of evidence only proves the witnesses the more false, reminding us forcibly of what the unbeliever in statistics said when pressed by facts: "so much the worse for facts." Hume merely cuts the ground from under us by saying, "The better the advocate the falser the man," and calls this manœuvre an argument.

Still, so long as miracles are complicated by mixture with matter, and wrought in the region of bodily elements, so long will their advocates have an arduous task, so many are the salient points presented to the adversary, so manifold are the counter theories and collateral suppositions generated by the event as postulated. To begin with, the disturbance of the laws of nature, *fixed* laws as they are held to be, is a great difficulty, great in proportion to the magnitude of the objects involved. Thus, a physical philosopher, who might perhaps admit the possibility of a mountain being removed into the sea, would

stagger at the literal acceptance of the sun and moon standing still, though he would probably add that both events were equally unscientific.

The omission of Joshua x. from the new Lectionary, as proposed by the Ritual Commission, is not without its significance as a sign of the times; the omission of the most sensational physical miracle of the Old Testament from the Sunday Services is very like a slur upon physical miracles generally. Henceforth, should the Lectionary become law, the thrilling spectacle of Joshua commanding the sun and moon to stand still will become conspicuous by its absence from our Sunday services. How are we to account for this except by supposing that so called science, as interpreted by Hume, has leavened the upper circles of theology—our religious leaders cannot feel their feet in presence of such a spectacle, and so they shelve it. The possibilities of collusion, misconception, and though last, not least, self-deception are multiplied as the tangible objects are multiplied, through the medium of which the worker of physical miracles shews his power; and it may have been, as stated at the outset, a consciousness of this liability, and a consequent shrinking from irreverent criticism, that caused our Lord to conceal rather than publish his miracles. *Essentially*

they were works of mercy, and incidentally only works of wonder; on the principle, then, of not letting the left hand know what the right hand did they were done in privacy rather than in public, out of love for the sufferers, not for purposes of ostentation. At all events, when His miracles did, as happened occasionally, draw upon our Lord adverse comments, He showed a lofty scorn of such attacks by passing them by in silence; or if He condescended to notice them at all, it was only by the question, "If I by Beelzebub cast out devils by whom do your sons cast them out?" Our Lord never, indeed, professed to work miracles *as such*, *i.e.* merely for the sake of creating astonishment, on the contrary, He told the Jews distinctly that no sign should be given them but the sign of the prophet Jonah, a saying of melancholy import, seeing it could not be fulfilled till they had filled up the measure of their iniquities; and again He seems to lament the craving for miracles in the sorrowfully accented words spoken to the nobleman of Capernaum, "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe." Perhaps that which most oppressed His spirit as He uttered these striking words—words apparently dissociated from the context—was the thought of the multitudes who would not believe though they did see

signs and wonders, of the multitudes who would reject not only his doctrine, but the confirmatory evidence afforded by the works done in His Father's name, which, though not done for the purpose of attracting attention or gratifying popular curiosity, were, when done, proofs to which He might confidently appeal; be this as it may, certain it is, that miracles are signs then, as now, on all sides spoken against.

Our complex nature often affords a handle to objectors, and is likely so to do until philosophy better explains the relations between soul and body. Marvellous is the influence of mind over matter, through the medium of that mysterious agency, the nervous system. Those delicate filaments which, growing from the brain as from a root, force their sensitive telegraphs into the remotest extremities of the body, and penetrate its entire texture with ubiquitous reticulation, are as yet very imperfectly understood. That they form the frontier territory between matter and spirit—between invisible mind and visible organs, is pretty generally agreed upon; but whether mind dwells in them, growing with their growth, decaying with their decay, and dying with their death, or whether they are only strings which intelligence, dwelling in some remoter or more exalted abode, pulls and directs

like the manipulator the automaton is a question for philosophers to decide. It suffices for the objector's argument that the sympathy between the two is of the closest nature. Of the miracles of our Lord at present tabulated by far the greater part are works of healing, or therapeutic miracles; and as to these, the impugners of miracles allege that imagination, or the influence of mind over matter, is sufficient to account for them; nor can it be denied that mental excitement is capable of producing in and upon the visible frame the most marvellous results—results which may justly be termed "miraculous" using the term in its strictly Latin sense of "wonderful," not "supernatural." In the circle of his own experience the writer could refer to the case of a young lady, well born and well educated, who for several months was totally blind, and who suddenly recovered her sight without any apparent reason, when on her way to the consulting-room of a London optician. Perhaps nine readers out of ten may exclaim, "Oh, this is quite natural; the cure was simply attributable to the dread of an operation, just as people with the toothache find the pain vanish the moment they put their fingers to the dentist's bell!" But, granting this, it only proves the influence of mind over matter, mental dread over

physical pain; and why should not *faith* in a deliverer whom the mind believes to be of sufficient power be a principle equally efficacious to produce a cure as the dread of a surgical operation? and the thoughtful reader of the New Testament has doubtless remarked that our Lord's works of healing were always wrought in answer to, or as tests of, *faith*. They were not merely *signs* as such, *i.e.* works of wonder for the purpose of producing conviction apart from previous faith, as for example the transformation of the rod of Moses, but they were strictly lessons in the school of faith, and illustrations of its marvellous efficacy, and it became Him who founded that Gospel of which justification by faith is a cardinal doctrine, thus to make as a rule the faith of the recipient an indispensable pre-requisite of his favours. Thus, in the case of the paralytic (Mark ii. 5) who was probably himself unconscious and incapable of faith, "Jesus saw their faith," *i.e*, the faith of the sick man's friends and bearers. To a daughter of Israel He says, "Thy faith hath made thee whole;" to a Gentile, "O woman great is thy faith," and not to multiply single instances we may detect the general law in the declaration, "All things are possible to him that believeth," (Mark ix. 23) and in the still more remarkable sentence levelled

against His own countrymen of Nazareth, "He did not many mighty works there," or as St. Mark says, "He could there do no mighty work" "because of their unbelief." This last assertion certainly affords a handle to those who strive to divest the miracle of what is supernatural, and to treat it as only the natural result of the subjective influence of mind. The writer could also refer to another young lady in the circle of his personal acquaintance who for many months was totally paralysed in her lower limbs, condemned to a perpetually recumbent position, and who having spent much substance on many physicians could not be healed of any, and yet without any apparent cause, and without the application of any remedy, suddenly regained the use of her limbs, and walked as if by a miracle. Medical men, if consulted on such cases, can say little or nothing in explanation. The usual thing is to look wise, and ascribe them to "hysteria," but if hysteria may account for such freaks of nature, what is to account for hysteria? and moreover, what is to limit the operation of hysteria to the nineteenth or any other century? Such cases might probably be multiplied without limit. by reference to books, especially those published within the pale of the Roman communion. An eye witness, however, of unimpeachable vera-

city, and a member of the medical profession, assured the writer that at the last exposition of the Holy Coat at Treves he witnessed cripples throw away their crutches and walk away cured of their maladies in a manner which he was totally unable to account for on the ordinary principles of his profession. But though preferring to restrict himself to what he has seen or heard the writer cannot refrain from citing as a specimen of all other cases that very ancient one recorded by Herodotus, in which a youth, dumb from his birth, suddenly gains the power of speech through the influence of strong mental emotion. Crœsus, king of Lydia, had a son unfortunately dumb; he applies to the Delphic oracle for advice, and receives a reply ominous in a double sense, to this effect: "Wish not that your son may speak, for the day in which he speaks will be an evil day for thee." During the storming of Sardis by the Persians a common soldier, meeting Crœsus was, through ignorance of his person, about to kill him, and the king, overwhelmed by his calamity took no care to avoid the blow or to escape death; whereupon his son, aforetime speechless, overcome with astonishment and terror exclaimed aloud, "O man do not kill Crœsus!" Then adds the historian, "This was the first time he had ever articulated, but he retained the

faculty of speech from this event as long as he lived."

And if in works of healing the influence of mind over matter be accounted a sufficient agency, if, that is, feelings intensely excited by fear, faith, or devotion be capable, apart from the supernatural, to make the lame walk, the dumb to speak, or the blind to see, the argument will generally be considered "a fortiori" if addressed to another large group of our Saviour's miracles, those namely of exorcism. The whole subject of demoniacal possession is one so obscure that it is difficult to find data for estimating aright what value to attribute to an act of exorcism as a work of wonder. The prayer of a righteous man availeth much, and there is nothing "a priori" impossible in a devout man having power over evil spirits through prayer and the invocation of the sacred name, whether of the "God of Abraham" or of Jesus. That an order of exorcists, genuine and not imposters, existed as a Jewish institution there is not only no reason to doubt but every reason to believe. Josephus distinctly recognizes such an order as existing in the reign of Solomon, and as having exercised their faculty in his own presence, and in that of the Emperor Vespasian (Book viii., chap. 2.) Our Lord's question, "By whom do your sons

cast them out," points to the existence of this order, for it would have been a weak argument to have appealed merely from Himself to his own disciples, and if the *vagabond* exorcists, mentioned in Acts xix., were only pretenders to the faculty, which is doubtful, they witness to the existence of the authentic order, just as counterfeit coin proves the existence of genuine, or medical quacks testify to the existence of diplomatized practitioners.

Works of healing and exorcism absorb twenty-one out of the miracles tabulated by Archbishop Trench in his masterly treatise, and two more, viz. the raising of Jairus' daughter and the widow's son, may be classed under works of healing by assuming that the patients were not quite dead—cases of suspended animation or catalepsy. The raising of Lazarus, the only miracle which Renan condescends to notice in his "Vie de Jesu," is treated by him as an ingeniously and elaborately contrived spectacle got up by previous arrangement, and as much a piece of acting as any scene in the compass of private theatricals; blasphemous as such an hypothesis may appear, it will pass current in some quarters; after which the notion of Paulus that the feeding of the multitudes, including two miracles, was only a kind of picnic on a large scale will hardly

seem extravagant. As to the walking on the sea, whether by our Saviour or by St. Peter, the modern spiritualist sees nothing wonderful about it. William Howitt, in his "History of the Supernatural," is at no loss for instances both in ancient and modern times of persons not only defying the laws of gravitation on the gross element of water, but floating through and in the air, like Habbakuk transported by the angel, or like Philip in his flight to Azotus; they would therefore rather despise as clumsy and unskilful the explanation resorted to by Rationalists that the walking on the sea was a mere figure of speech, or embellishment by poetic license of "walking on the shore;" and the system which thus disposes of the walking on the sea makes little difficulty about the water turned into wine: at the confident assertion or peremptory dictation of a practised operator persons of intelligence and above suspicion of collusion are readily found to declare water to be wine and wine to be water. The stilling of the tempest may easily be ascribed to superior sagacity and knowledge of atmospheric prognostications. "The multitude of fishes," including two miracles, may be set down as "lucky hits" considering how those creatures congregate in shoals. A flash of lightning may be held to account for the withering of the fig tree, while

the stater in the fish's mouth may be paralleled by the "Ring of Polycrates."

It is easy of course to say that such criticisms are nothing more than the froth or scum thrown off in the fermentation of the sound wine of human reason, but the authors of them defiantly ask for refutations rather than generalities or assertions; and so long as it is easy to hazard novel and daring opinions but difficult to prove a negative, so long will such rash criticisms jar upon the feelings of old fashioned believers, who have a traditional reverence for the New Testament. To confront such criticisms with direct negatives is not only seriously to tax the time and skill of the reasoner, but the results too often amount only to this, to leave the adversary unconvinced, even as "a man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still," whilst in the eyes of those whom we term "orthodox" the contest is a waste of strength, the argument a superfluity of words, which however victorious only "slays the slain," and proves what has never been doubted. Impressed by these considerations it occurred to the writer that it might be possible to find another basis altogether for our belief in the supernatural element of our Lord's character, and by withdrawing the discussion on miracles altogether from the region of

matter and physical laws to escape the painfully irreverent criticisms with which we are now assailed. In short to change the "venue," as it were, of the trial from the territory of the visible and physical to that of the invisible and spiritual—if a sufficient number of wonders can be found in the region of mind proper, to establish the authenticity of the Saviour's character, the physical miracles may then be maintained simply and solely on the strength of that character, since it would be plainly inconsistent with such a character to descend to the arts of deception or imposition. Such is the origin and explanation of the present attempt, and the writer in the execution of it will be abundantly rewarded if thereby he can only add a single pebble to the cairn of Christian evidences.*

* Since the above was written a reprint of John Henry Newman's "Essays on Miracles" has appeared, to which he appends a note to this effect: that facts have come to his knowledge since the time of the original publication of the latter of those essays, 1842-43, which compel him to withdraw from the domain of controversy one of the miracles therein elaborately described, viz. "The power of speech continued to the African confessors deprived of their tongues," another proof of the inherent weakness of physical miracles.

Advent, 1870.

The following are the New Testament Miracles as tabulated by Archbishop Trench:

I.—The Water turned into Wine.

II.—The Healing of the Nobleman's Son.

III.—The First Miraculous Draft of Fishes.

IV.—The Stilling of the Tempest.

V.—The Demoniacs in the Country of the Gadarenes.

VI.—The Raising of Jairus' Daughter.

VII.—The Healing of a Woman with an Issue of Blood.

VIII.—The Opening of the Eyes of two Blind in the House.

IX.—The Healing of the Paralytic.

X.—The Cleansing of the Leper.

XI.—The Healing of the Centurion's Servant.

XII.—The Demoniac in the Synagogue of Capernaum.

XIII.—The Healing of Simon's Wife's Mother.

XIV.—The Raising of the Widow's Son.

XV.—The Healing of the Impotent Man at Bethsaida.

XVI.—The Miraculous Feeding of Five Thousand.

XVII.—The Walking on the Sea.

XVIII.—The Opening of the Eyes of One Born Blind.

XIX.—The Restoring of the Man with a Withered Hand.

XX.—The Restoring of a Woman with a Spirit of Infirmity.

XXI.—The Healing of the Man with a Dropsy.

XXII.—The Cleansing of the Ten Lepers.

XXIII.—The Healing of the Daughter of the Syrophenician Woman.

XXIV.—The Healing of the Deaf and Dumb.

XXV.—The Miraculous Feeding of Four Thousand.

XXVI.—The Opening of the Eyes of one Blind at Bethsaida.

XXVII.—The Healing of the Lunatic Child.

XXVIII.—The Stater in the Fish's Mouth.

XXIX.—The Raising of Lazarus.

XXX.—The Opening of the Eyes of Two Blind Men near Jericho.

XXXI.—The Cursing of the Barren Fig Tree.

XXXII.—The Healing of Malchus' Ear.

XXXIII.—The Second Miraculous Draft of Fishes.

All of which require for their accomplishment the suspension or violation of some natural or physical law.

To these it is proposed to add—

1st.—The Astonishment of Nathanael. (John i. 49.)

2nd.—The Expulsion of The Traders, two occasions. (1st, John ii. 15; 2nd, Matt. xxi. 12; Mark xi. 15; Luke xix. 45.)

3rd—The Mob of Nazareth Eluded. (Luke iv. 30.)

4th—The Disclosures to the Woman and People of Samaria. (John iv. 4—43,)

5th—The Discomfiture of the "Officers" or Police, two occasions (1st John vii. 46; 2nd, John, xviii. 6.)

6th—The Assailants in the Temple Eluded. (John viii. 59.)

7th—The Processional Colt. (Matt. xxi. 2; Mark xi. 1; Luke xix. 29; John xii. 14.)

8th—The Concession of the Guest Chamber. Matt. xxvi. 17; Mark xiv. 12; Luke xxii. 7.)

9th—The Dream of Pilate's Wife. (Matt. xxvii. 19.)

All of which, from their non-physical nature, require in their operation no such interruption of visible and material laws.

THE ASTONISHMENT OF NATHANAEL.

"Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel."—St. John i. 49.

It is difficult to find any one word fitted to denote or designate the change of which Nathanael was the subject—a change equally astounding both in its suddenness and its thoroughness; the terms "conviction" and "conversion" referring as they usually do to a stricken conscience and to a heart turning away from some special sin, are hardly appropriate to this man of spotless life. *His* conversion was total change of opinion rather than reformation of conduct; and to describe the event merely as "the calling" of Nathanael is weak and unworthy of the occasion, for there is that in it which makes it a "calling" sui generis, a conquest of the new doctrines over the old, entitled to special celebrity and distinction. Altogether it is one of the most wonderful mental phenomena on record. Nathanael was a man evidently wrapt up in a Conservative prepossessions. When his friends and companions sought to win him to their side, and plied him with arguments, the only answer they

obtained was, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Religiously devoted to the traditions and institutions of his race he turned in lofty scorn from novelties which in his eyes were only a delusion and a snare. If a type were wanted of a rigid Conservative that type would be admirably furnished by Nathanael seeking, in proud isolation, the retirement of his fig-tree shade. "Stare super antiquas vias" is manifestly his motto; he dreads change and innovation as poison, but his conservatism is united, as we often observe it in more recent times, with high principle, and with a noble disdain of all that is specious, plausible, or insincere. The Saviour with one master-stroke depicts all these traits of character in the words, "Behold an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile."

Yet this rigid champion of orthodoxy as expounded by the Scribes and Pharisees, this disciple of the old school, this pillar of established views, compacted by the cement of prejudice, is destined to melt like a snow-flake in the sun, at the first salutation of that Saviour whose cause he had previously held in contempt, whose antecedents he despised, and to whom in his secret exercises under the fig-tree he had probably vowed that nothing should ever persuade him to listen. But not only

are his original prejudices and prepossessions entirely dissolved, but on the instant the whole structure of his mental being, is re-cast in a totally different mould, affording a practical instance not to be surpassed of the Apostle's saying, "Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." Can we fail to note in so sudden, so marvellous, so radical, so complete a change the operation of something superhuman? A cool-headed, sober-minded man like Nathanael was not one to become the dupe of cajolery or imposition. How then are we to account for that conquest which changed him from an opponent to a disciple? How, but by believing him to have been convinced on evidence irresistible, of our Lord's supernatural insight into his character and deeds? What other comment can we make on the event before us than that made by the magicians of Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God;" and if so, are we not entitled to record the astonishment and confession of Nathanael on the roll of miracles as a wonder surpassing any human power to accomplish, and therefore as a testimony of the supernatural and divine power of Him who wrought the marvel? It is true that the minds of men are sometimes changed by the force of argument or persuasion, but how slow and laborious the process usually is!

How little, rhetoric, and eloquence, and oratory, and argument avail to change pronounced opinions is evidenced by the rarity of any conversions effected during the debates of deliberative assemblies. No matter how able or fervid the speakers the result of a division in the House of Commons for instance, is known almost to a man beforehand, and if instances are on record of the hearts of a nation being bowed as the heart of one man by a few touching words spoken in due season, the result arises not so much from the force of those words as from the fact that the hearts to whom they are addressed are in a prepared state, a state that is ready for combustion, and only waiting for a spark to cause the whole to burst into a flame.

But none of the arts before mentioned were employed in the conversion of Nathanael. A few incisive words, neither addressed to the feelings nor yielding the slightest trace of fervid utterance, or cogency of manner, are the means of producing this astounding mental revolution in a person not only not predisposed for it but preresolved firmly to resist any such innovation in his character. Nothing can be more totally devoid of "παρατηρησις" or outward demonstration of manner than this interview between the Saviour and Nathanael; so far from resembling an impassioned appeal to

sentiment, imagination, or enthusiasm, the Saviour's address to Nathanael may be likened rather to a ray of light refracted from an icicle, and carrying its point by sheer force of accuracy, precision, and truth. Nothing can afford a more complete refutation of the theory set up by Renan, and advocated by the author of "Ecce Homo," that our Lord attracted His disciples by the contagion of enthusiasm than the interview of our Lord with Nathanael. The biographers who ascribe our Saviour's influence to powers and manifestations akin to the frenzy of a covenanter or the excitement of a field preacher at camp meetings, derive their materials not from Scripture but from the chambers of imagery within their own brains. Nothing can be more devoid of artificial stimulant than the words addressed to Nathanael, "Before that Philip called thee when thou wast under the fig-tree I saw thee." There is doubtless something strange and singular, and likely to excite curiosity about this acutely pointed statement. To bystanders it would appear abrupt and apropos of nothing, but there is no reason to think that their curiosity, if excited was ever gratified. The occasion or incident to which these words apply was most probably a profound if not a sacred secret between the Master and the Neophyte. What-

ever might have been the disappointment of contemporaries at the total absence of explanation, subsequent expositors have shown themselves impatient of this reticence, and not only attracted but almost fascinated by the question what was Nathanael doing under the fig-tree? and in giving reins to their curiosity their observation has hurried by, or but feebly remarked the weightier matters involved herein, the testimony afforded to the supernatural in a conversion effected by means and in a manner superior to all human experience, and hence it is that the astonishment and conversion of Nathanael has never yet been called a miracle, though as a psychologic wonder, defying explanation on ordinary principles, it cannot be surpassed.

Much stress is laid, and rightly so, on the removal of the incredulity of St. Thomas, as affording a triumphant ratification of the evidences of the Resurrection, yet little or no stress has been laid upon an operation equally difficult—the removal of early-instilled and confirmed prejudice. St. Thomas's conversion was the result of tangible proof or material evidence, and therefore removed from the domain of the miraculous, but the awe-struck Nathanael was convinced by the revealing of a secret which he knew could only be known to himself and to Omniscience, and hence the value

as an evidence of the confession, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God: Thou art the King of Israel." He was convinced thereby that he stood in the presence of a Divine Being or rather of *the* Divine Being—"The Lord the God of knowledge, by whom actions are weighed." Here, then, we have a confession quite as full and explicit as that which on a subsequent occasion was uttered by St. Peter, and that, without any time allowed for growth, experience, or intercourse. That which in St. Peter was the result of two years' training and intimate conversation was here produced at first sight, and at first hearing by an instantaneous transformation. The Saviour spoke and it was done.

Now, if we behold a plant suddenly developed from its germ into the matured conditions of nature, having stem, leaves, branches, blossoms, fruit, all completely formed before our eyes within the space of a single glance, after the manner of Aaron's rod, which budded, such an occurrence would be in strict conformity with the generally received idea of a miracle; but no amount of evidence would induce a physical philosopher to put faith in it. He would straightway pronounce it impossible, incredible, or both. Listen to the emphatic, not to say solemn declaration by an interpreter of this school, the Rev. Baden Powell in "Essays and

Reviews," (Ed. vi. p. 108). "The entire range of the inductive philosophy is at once based upon, and in every instance tends to confirm, by immense accumulation of evidence, the grand truth of the universal order and constancy of natural causes as a primary law of belief, so strongly entertained and fixed in the mind of every truly inductive inquirer that he cannot even conceive the possibility of its failure."

But a metamorphosis in the region of mind does not clash with any of these so called "fixed laws" in the region of matter, and the science which forbids us to believe that the Ethiopian could change his skin, or the leopard his spots, has no weapons wherewith to assail a person's change of mind, simply because its dealings are with matter and not with spirit; and yet a change of mind may be contrary to all ordinary experience, unaccountable on any of the recognised principles of human conduct, and therefore wonderful, and therefore miraculous, if we divest our notion and definition of a miracle of the assumption only conventionally belonging to it, that it must involve the suspension or reversal of some physical law. And such a change of mind was that of Nathanael. It was a wonder unprecedented, and contrary to all *a priori* probability. Where shall we look for an instance

of a pronounced obstructive, changed instantaneously into an advanced liberal? as well might we expect to find a case of an ignorant rustic suddenly changed into a mathematician, yet no less a change do we note in the condition of Nathanael's mind, between the question, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth," and the confession which heads this chapter.

It may, perhaps be alleged that we have recently seen a Conservative Government turn more liberal than the Liberals themselves, and pass a sweeping measure of reform. True, but how long did it take Mr. Disraeli to "*educate*"—such was his word—to educate his party for the purpose? What heart-burnings did it not cause in the Conservative camp, and how many seceders of the truest conservative type bitterly denounced the movement! All experience proves that it is not in the nature of things for men to change their views and opinions radically, totally, and instantaneously, and therefore when such a change does occur it is surely worthy of being noted as a miracle, and as affording overwhelming testimony to the supernatural influence of Him through whose instrumentality it was effected. We have, then, in the conversion and confession of Nathanael a rock upon which a solid structure may be reared, a sure foundation upon

which faith may build, and against which the tempests raised by inductive philosophers and physical controversialists have no power. Yet, instead of discovering this invaluable foundation, biblical students seem rather to have amused themselves, like children on the sands of the sea shore, in picking up pebbles. Pages on pages have been written to prove that Nathanael was the same as Bartholomew, which no one wishes to dispute, and which no one feels much the better for, when proved. Again, a great deal of useless power has been expended on the question whether or no Nathanael was a Rabbi, a point which can never be certainly ascertained, and would signify very little if it could; and as previously noticed, the employment of Nathanael under the fig-tree has been a fruitful theme of fruitless speculation. Lightfoot naïvely assures us that it is not necessary to suppose that anything improper is intended. Burgon of Oriel lays it down that there must have been some "exquisite circumstance" about it, whatever that may mean. Most other commentators, including Archbishop Trench, incline to the view that a vision of angels is referred to. This opinion seems mainly based on the concluding words of the chapter, in apparent forgetfulness that those words are addressed, not to Nathanael alone but to all the

bystanders generally. "Hereafter *ye* shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." It is true that "λέγει αὐτῷ" "He saith unto *him*," precedes these words, but the change of person from singular to plural makes it clear that Nathanael was not exclusively addressed. But here is another argument which may sound wise when uttered with oracular solemnity, but which if a schoolboy sent it up at a competitive examination would not recommend him to us as a close reasoner. "Nathanael, in the title 'Israelite indeed,' is connected with Jacob surnamed Israel. Jacob was favoured by angelic visions, therefore Nathanael was gifted with special discernment of these celestial beings."

But however impenetrable the veil of mystery which hangs over the event itself, that which is certain is, that Nathanael, being neither credulous nor weak-minded, nor predisposed for conviction, saw in our Lord's allusion to that event sufficient to convince him that the speaker was divine. Surely there is enough material of wonder here to constitute the event a "miracle," and one which deserves not to be neglected, though afterwards to be surpassed and thrown into the shade by "greater things than these."

There arises, perhaps, in some minds an objection based on the 11th verse of the second chapter of St. John, coupled with the last verse of Chapter IV., in which the descriptive term "beginning of miracles" is applied to the miracle of Cana. If a formal answer only were required to this objection it would be very easy to say that our Lord Himself, in speaking of His miracles, classes them under two heads, denominated *σημεῖα* and *τέρατα*. St. John declares the changing of the water into wine to be the beginning of *signs*, "*τὴν ἀρχὴν τῶν σημείων*;" but this statement in no way denies the previous occurrence of the other kind of miracle denominated "*τέρας*," or prodigy. The distinction between "signs" and "wonders" has perhaps never been considered as much as it deserves, certain it is that our Lord would not make a distinction without a difference, and may not the distinction favour the view that some miracles are adapted for founding a religion, others for preserving it, the former being more expressly addressed to the senses, the latter to the mind; the one being intended to influence the perceptive, the other the reflective powers; in short, the one being marvellous to the eyes, the other to the understanding, and, speaking subjectively, the one being physical the other metaphysical. If this distinction be admitted

it is no disparagement to the metaphysical miracles that the contemporaries of our Lord in the flesh, were little, if at all, aware of them. Accustomed to ocular proofs, their minds would not search for metaphysical ones; engrossed by the demonstration of visible agencies they might see without perceiving the demonstration of the Spirit; and thus we are furnished not only with a formal solution of the difficulty raised by the term "beginning of miracles," but also with a reasonable explanation why the Evangelist might fix on the miracle of Cana as that beginning.

THE EXPULSION OF THE TRADERS.

"A scourge of small cords."—John ii. 15.

To AIM at the sublime and miss it is to become ridiculous, this is a stereotyped maxim. A much lower depth of contempt and ridicule must be his lot who undertakes to wield the symbol of divine wrath without supernatural or divine power to sustain him: on this ground the scene in which the scourge of small cords was invested with so strange a power is lifted above the ordinary dealings between man and man, and exalted to the region of miracle on the basis of the morally supernatural. Had the event in question only occurred at our Lord's last Passover, when he entered Jerusalem in triumph, floated on the mighty wave of popular enthusiasm, it might have been less marvellous in our eyes, but it marked the commencement as well as the close of His career, and in each case His supremacy was complete. Not only were the traders themselves expelled but their sheep and oxen were dispersed and their tables overthrown: no sign of resistance was suffered to be shewn, but the owners of the sheep and oxen were to all

appearance as much panic-stricken as the sheep and oxen themselves. Such a victory over such a class the more we look at it the more we find it inexplicable on ordinary or natural principles. Men of all classes hold with tenacity to their established places and possessions, and of all classes none are less easily disturbed in those possessions than the professionally moneyed class; they are not likely to be overcome by sudden weakness or swayed by visionary fears, neither are they particularly accessible to reproaches of conscience, or easily induced by religious considerations to surrender their rights and privileges; on the contrary, they keenly resent any interference with established usages, and are quick to rebel against any religious intruder who may venture to invade their domain.

Not long ago an eccentric enthusiast, calling himself Father Ignatius, was mobbed in the streets of London, and compelled to beat an ignominious retreat because he ventured to preach in a city church against the corrupting influence of mammon. He was acknowledged by all who heard him to be a man of real power, eloquence, and religious fervour, but because he dared to strike out a line of his own, going about in a strange mediæval dress, and departing from the groove of established proprieties, he narrowly escaped rough usage, &

not bodily extinction at the hands of that very class over whom the Saviour, equally unknown to fame, for it was His first public appearance at Jerusalem, exercised so absolute an authority. How can this be explained save by ascribing to the Saviour miraculous moral influence which it would be profane for any mere mortal to pretend to.

The same merchant class who mobbed Mr. Lyne, and who formerly made their place of assembly in the nave of St. Paul's, where doubtless they would equally have resented any interference with prescriptive usage, are found in the Temple of Jerusalem to quail as one man beneath a celestial influence, and to surrender without opposition, demonstration, or protest, the position which has been theirs by hereditary custom. Beholding such a surrender, indicating as it does so sudden and complete a moral transformation, who can doubt that the influence which caused it was both miraculous and divine, and such a miracle, while it contradicts not in any way the visible laws of matter, is removed far as the east is from the west from the possibility of collusion or deception of any kind. Great, then, must be the accession of strength to the Christian advocate by asserting it as such. The idea seems to have dimly dawned on the minds of expositors but they have never

asserted it, much less demanded for it the prominence it so well deserves; on the other hand their perception of the fact finds utterance in language tending rather to ignore it, an instance of misplaced modesty, if not of mistaken policy: thus, for example, the very popular Dr. Kitto, after describing the event comments on it thus: "No miracle was needed," and as a proof that no miracle was needed, goes on to say that we often see a single officer of the law, strong in the consciousness of right, disperse an excited rabble weak in the consciousness of wrong. But where is the resemblance between an excited rabble and the traders in the temple. So far from being liable to arrest by the municipal police, they had the law on their side. It is by no means improbable that they paid rents for their occupations to the temple authorities, just as merchants in an exchange, or the minor hucksters in the open market; and they would be conscious of no wrong doing when they were merely conducting their ordinary callings in their accustomed place and according to established usage. So far from being necessarily conscience-stricken, they might have asserted a righteous indignation at interference on the plea that their presence in the temple afforded facilities to strangers coming from a distance to offer sacrifice. They

might have spoken of themselves as enlisted in the cause of religion instead of feeling the stings of self-accusation, or at least if any suspicion of blame existed they might have thrown it on their superiors, who permitted them to be there. To take another illustration, a traffic is carried on in the present day, which many sensitive minds regard as more unholy than that of the traders in the temple. The traffic in church livings. Yet whoever heard of the "clerical agent," or of his employer, whether lay or clerical, being smitten with remorse of conscience when driving a hard bargain, or any other bargain, for a next presentation with immediate possession? Why, then, should the gospel interpreter seek to reduce by far-fetched parellels a wonder-working influence to the level of a mere ordinary transaction. A wise general, however certain he may feel of victory, neglects no advantage, despises no weapon; and have the champions of Christianity so entirely silenced their adversaries as to be raised above the suggestions of ordinary prudence? Can they afford to throw away arguments which Holy Scripture provides for the defence of truth? Is it not their duty to insist on every supernatural event as an argument in favour of their Lord's divinity? That doctrine rests upon cumulative evidence, and what would be a super-

fluous argument to one mind may be the most certain antidote to unbelief in another. At all events, when Scripture has given us a miracle it is only playing the adversary's game to explain it away as an every day occurrence.

THE MOB OF NAZARETH ELUDED.

"But he passing through the midst of them went his way.—Luke iv. 30.

If Mr. Robert Lowe, or the shade of Sir Charles Wetherell, or of any other enlightened statesman could recount their experiences in making their escape from a mob, we should be furnished with a descriptive picture as unlike the above sublime sentence as night is unlike day; and the question arises whether so marked a contrast be not sufficient to prove our Saviour incomparably superior to any ordinary mortal however enlightened or distinguished, and to raise the event itself above the level of every day life into the region of the miraculous.

Not only was the Saviour's escape deferred until they had passed outside the city gates, where alone shelter might have been found in a house, and escape through a back door, but it is expressly stated that He passed through the midst of them, in other words, made His escape from the very centre of the infuriated crowd.

The question is, how was He protected? When St. Stephen was mobbed by an excited populace there was no rescue vouchsafed for him. Nor was the frenzy of the crowd assuaged by the angelic illumination of his countenance: yet the mob of Nazareth were equally if not more resolved to carry their deadly purpose to the bitter end. No language can be stronger than the description given in the 28th verse: "And all they in the synagogue when they heard these things were filled with wrath." The preacher had not only announced Himself as the Messiah, but had denounced their own spirit of exclusiveness by the examples of Naaman the Syrian and the Sidonian widow, who were selected for special favours though external to the pale. This was more than they could bear: Joseph reciting his dreams to his brethren is a lively emblem of the Nazarene preaching to the Nazarites. They could not endure that one whom they had regarded as an obscure person should suddenly assume to be greater than the greatest in Israel; and we may imagine them paraphrasing the words of Joseph's brethren, and saying let us cast him down headlong from the precipice and we shall see what will become of his prophecies.

A rabble so intent on mischief, aided and abetted if not instigated and guided by the rulers of their

synagogue, would not desist from their purpose without some adequate cause. Natural causes were altogether insufficient: in the natural order of things the popular will would have had its way, and the mob which had triumphed so far, and which was physically irresistible in its unanimity, would have made short work of the accomplishment of its purpose against a solitary and defenceless person. The version of Pfenninger, which has some admirers on account of its epigrammatic form, describes a scene derived from his own imagination, and may be taken as a good specimen of free translation run mad, for it embodies no feature of the original gospel statement, but on the contrary, everything conceivable which that statement does not contain. "They stood, stopped, inquired, were ashamed, fled, separated." If the popular tumult had really been assuaged in this graduated manner, and if the people really had changed their minds, like the populace of Melita, when the viper's bite proved harmless to the Apostle Paul, could not the Evangelist just as easily have said so as have left it on record that He passed through the midst of them and went His way. The plain fact is that the thoughtful student perceives that if a miracle be not acknowledged here, something must be invented in lieu of one.

The Rev. John Lamb, in his able Hulsean Lectures on "The Rejection of Christ by the Jews" 1860, remarks on this event, "We need not suppose that there was an external miracle, such as blindness inflicted on his enemies." But the remark is made in that deprecating tone which so often is used to convey an implied affirmative under a verbal negative, and shews that had he given us boldly his first thoughts instead of waiting for second thoughts he would have pronounced in favour of a miracle. His mind is so far infected with the prevailing spirit of criticism, that he writes in spite of himself, as if it were a merit to eliminate as much as possible the supernatural from our Lord's works, as if miracles were blemishes in sacred history to be explained away where practicable—matters for an expositor to be shy of rather than to magnify, to be apologised for rather than to be gloried in. The phenomenon, as here described by the Evangelist, is just that which would have occurred if a sudden confusion of sight had been inflicted on the demented rabble; not blindness in the sense of extinction of the material organ, but an interruption of "*rapport*," or understanding between the external structure and the spiritual sensibilities connected therewith by the optic nerve, just as a passing thunder-cloud throws into confusion the

operations of the telegraph, and makes the operator at one end unable to communicate with the reader at the other. This kind of blindness would only be a passing influence, but while it lasted it would effectually debar the crowd from their purpose, and their captive would be free; and to produce it would be an act of supernatural power, though not trenching in any degree on any natural law.

This theory derives confirmation from events of Old Testament history, and from the fact that there are in Hebrew two words for blindness—1st, "*sanvaireem*," confusion of sight or non-physical blindness; 2nd, "*ivvoroun*," organic blindness or extinction of the outward organ. It was the former of these inflictions which disabled the people of Sodom and protected the patriarch in his dwelling when "they wearied themselves to find the door." Had they been struck with stone-blindness, or entire privation of the external organ, they must have desisted altogether from any further attempt to effect their purpose; but they were blind, in a manner, without knowing it, they continued to see objects but their sight was confused and distorted, so that they could not put their hands upon the objects which they saw—they were in fact as men groping in darkness, reduced to utter helplessness without feeling their incapacity.

Precisely similar was the condition of the Syrians in Dothan who were smitten at the prayer of the prophet with "*sanvaireem*," or the non-physical blindness. Had they been stone-blind they could not have continued their march; but their cognizance of outward objects was so uncertain and erroneous that unconsciously to themselves they became helpless tools at the disposal of the prophet himself, who led them by a way they did not intend to go, to a city where they were at the mercy of their master's enemy, even to Samaria, and great was their astonishment to find themselves there when the Lord opened their eyes, or restored their visual faculty to its normal state. We may observe in each of these instances of non-physical blindness an exact parallel of what took place when the mob of Nazareth ceased to retain their captive in their grasp. Their actions ceased to have their true bearing, they had no longer any accuracy of aim; they would lose all unity of purpose; the crowd would become a disintegrated mass, "a rope of sand," in customary phrase. Each person in it might seize hold of the wrong person and fancy him to be the object of their wrath, and no two among them seize the same person, thus their captive would be released, and he would naturally pass through the midst of them and go his way.

There is nothing here requiring the suspension of any natural law, for this "*sanvaireem*" or confusion of sight may be taken to mean nothing more than the extreme form of what we call in the present day "nervousness," the action of which we continually witness in numberless variety of instances, such as the random shots of a usually skilful billiard player when influenced by over anxiety or extreme earnestness, or in the random answers of a scholar suffering from the trepidation incidental to the ordeal of a public examination; and yet to produce this confusion at a given time and for a given purpose universally, in a crowd of ordinary people, is not within the power of man. Divine power could alone inflict it, and therefore we infer that the Saviour in escaping from the mob of Nazareth wielded a supernatural agency, and by the same rule we do not hesitate to call the event a miracle.

THE DISCLOSURES TO THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA.—John iv.

"He told me all that ever I did."—John iv. 39.

THE power of introspection—not self-introspection, as the word commonly means, but the power of seeing into the mind of another person, which wrought so effectually in the conversion of Nathanael, is yet more widely and conspicuously manifested in that series of disclosures at Samaria, of which the one vouchsafed to the woman by the well of Jacob is only the first in order. We are not told how many persons in addition to the woman were convinced by the communications made to them: the recital seems to imply that they were too numerous to take account of. The woman reported her experience to the "men" of the city generally, whereupon they went out to satisfy themselves by a personal interview, or by evidence at first hand, and the result was that not only many believed on the testimony of the woman, but "many more believed because of His own word." Thus the occurrence does not rest on the unsupported evidence of a possibly weak woman, but is based on the testimony of a cloud of witnesses taken from the less im-

pressible sex. Our Lord divulged certain secrets which caused the woman to exclaim, "Sir, I perceive that Thou art a prophet." In all probability the disclosure as to the five husbands was only a small part of what He told her, just a specimen of a multitude of statements proving intimate acquaintance with her inner life, a specimen easily remembered, and likely to be reported by the woman to her townsmen, and thereby to come to the ears of the disciples in the course of common conversation during their two days' stay in or near Samaria, for in all probability the disciples out of deference to their Master laid aside their prejudices and remained with Him whilst He abode there.

"The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" is a sentence forcibly denoting the wide social gulf which kept the two communities apart, and this is sufficient to explain why the disciples "marvelled" when they saw their Master in conversation with one of the hated and despised race. And this rigid isolation of one people from the other ought to remove every trace of suspicion, could any arise, that the information which the Lord revealed could have been gained in ordinary intercourse, after the fashion of the itinerant fortune-teller, or any other pretender to the so-called clairvoyant faculty. The woman herself, who was doubtless the best judge

of the nature of the revelations made to her, harboured no such suspicion, and if the men to whom she reported her interview entertained any suspicions at first, they were entirely removed by hearing for themselves, for they said, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ the Saviour of the world." Had the disclosures thus made been limited to a solitary case they might have been ascribed to what is termed "a lucky hit," but this hypothesis entirely breaks down under the weight of corroborative testimony rendered by the men of the city. From whence then could the Saviour have gained the knowledge He displayed on this occasion except from "the God in heaven that revealeth secrets," or in other words, from essential identity with Him "from whom no secrets are hid?" It is generally admitted that no miracle has a better title to be so called than prophecy verified. To prophesy is not merely to foretell future events but to reveal things naturally unknown to the speaker, for example, the soldiers' demand to our Lord, "Prophesy unto us thou Christ who is he that smote thee," is a case in point. The prediction of future events may be called a miracle inchoate, pending the fulfilment of the prediction. The revealing of things

simplicity and brevity of them is remarkable, being no more than "I am he." The address, or salutation, or remonstrance, or whatever it was that signalized the first occasion, was probably equally simple and equally brief. But whether or not, what could mere words avail, however solemn or however pursuasive, to paralyse the strong arm of Roman law and reduce the iron sternness of its officers to helpless imbecility. Apart from Divine power acting supernaturally on the mind, and producing therein a miraculous and indescribable sense of awe, the most sublime, weighty, or impassioned words would have been treated by such an auditory as "trifles light as air." The marvellous influence here exercised must have been similar in kind to that which ejected the traders from the temple, but the wonder is increased by the consideration that the persons thus panic-stricken were Romans instead of Jews, were professional officers of police instead of ordinary citizens. Of all persons or classes most hardened against any appeal to sentiment or feeling, the municipal police, both by practice, profession, and duty, are most completely so. No government could stand for a moment if its subordinate officers could not be depended on rigorously to execute orders. They go about their work with the inexorable movement

of machinery. They are told to go, and they go, to come, and they come, to execute this order, and they execute it. They of all people most fully realize the description which Shelley gives of the Pope: "a rite, a law, a custom, not a man;" that is they go by regulations not by views or reasons of humanity. A policeman failing to execute a warrant through admiration of the person against whom it was directed, or a sheriff's officer shrinking from his duty through pity, would be an anomaly in any organized society, and therefore a more astounding spectacle cannot be conceived than a body of police being sent by authority to arrest a prisoner and returning not only without having made their capture, but without any attempt to excuse themselves on the plea of resistance by superior force, but merely with the incompetent and self-damaging story, "Never man spake like this man." What right had they to listen to the words of Him whom they were bound to seize? Though they might have entertained some secret admiration for Him or for His works, yet in the execution of their duty they were bound to smother all such sentiments, and to think only of obedience to orders. At all events no civil government could stand if the police were to be influenced by private "views" or "feelings." Authority would be brought into

ridicule, and all stability would cease. When, therefore, we behold such a fact accomplished, how can we help saying that it is contrary to all moral and political experience? And if contrary to experience is it not a valid evidence of a superior power working by unseen influence in a manner unmistakeably triumphant, and in a course absolutely præternatural though not counternatural? Although Hume declares a miracle to be "a violation of the laws of nature," yet he implies almost in the same breath that if an event be contrary to uniform experience it merits the appellation of a miracle. Let us adopt this second definition, and out of his own mouth let our adversary be judged, for such a reversal of experience as that afforded by the self-accusing and self-convicted officers must, according to Hume himself, be accounted as a miracle.

THE ASSAILANTS IN THE TEMPLE ELUDED.

"Jesus hid himself."—John viii. 59. (Compare also x. 39.)

THE deliverance thus described may be coupled with another escape, Chapter x., verse 39, of the same gospel. On both occasions the fury of the people had been excited to the utmost pitch by the claim of our Saviour to be "of one substance with the Father," so plainly asserted in the first instance by the use of the uncommunicable name in reference to Himself, saying, Before "Abraham was I am;" in the second by the more explicit and categoric declaration, "I and my Father are one." What the Arians were so willingly and wilfully ignorant of, the Jews made no pretence of misunderstanding. The Nazarene was either consubstantial with the Father, or a deceiver: there was no middle hypothesis. They could not accept the former, and so they voted Him a deceiver and blasphemer, and on both occasions they took up stones to cast at Him, and on each occasion He eluded their fury in a manner which recalls the escape at Nazareth, so that these two deliverances may be regarded as

homogeneous with that miracle, and similar comments will in the main apply to all three.

We are not of course overlooking the fact that the concluding words of John viii., "going through the midst of them and so passed by," are not found in the Sinaitic and Vatican manuscripts, and are regarded by many interpreters as a gloss incorporated wtth the text in the process of transcription. Assuming this to be the case it only shews that some remote transcriber or commentator recorded the view of the early Church that the miracle was to be interpreted in conjunction with the escape at Nazareth, by quoting almost word for word the passage in Luke iv. 30, "But he passing through the midst of them went his way." The substance of the miracle is, however, embodied in the words "Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple." There are only four ways in which this statement can possibly be interpreted: first, That our Lord hid Himself behind some projection, or in some chamber, after the manner of children playing hide and seek; or secondly, that He mingled with a group of disciples, and effected His escape by setting one crowd against another; or thirdly, that He rendered Himself invisible; or fourthly, that He influenced the visual sensibilities of His persecutors so as to produce a partial blind-

ness, a kind of monablepsia if we may coin a word, or blindness for one thing.

The first of these explanations, besides being at variance with the dignity of His character Whose works were not done in a corner, and Who was not accustomed to seek refuge in such places of concealment, is inconsistent with the rest of the statement, "He went out of the temple." There is no break between the words "hid Himself" and "went out of the temple." There was therefore no interval for this kind of manœuvre. The second explanation, or the notion that He mixed with some of His believing auditors, is also incompatible with the general sense of the story, for it would have been impossible for one crowd to come into collision with another without a tumult; and if this had occurred there must have been a "suppressio veri" on the part of the historian at variance with good faith and veracity, which good faith and veracity on the part of the sacred authors is always in the course of this argument assumed to be implicitly relied on.

We are reduced, then, to two hypotheses: we must believe the "hiding" to have consisted either in the subjective concealment of the Redeemer's person, He rendering Himself invisible after the manner of the invisible cloaks of our nursery

books, or in an objective operation wrought upon the spectators, producing confusion or partial suspension of the visual faculty. Without dogmatizing we prefer the latter explanation as more consistent with the descriptive passage itself, and more in harmony with other parallel passages, and likewise more in keeping with the dignity of the Saviour's character. And if we adopt this explanation we gain an important contribution to our catalogue of non-physical miracles, as the visual faculty comprises a wide region of spiritual susceptibilities in addition to the outward organ, which is a mere instrument. There are the eyes of the understanding as well as the eyes of the body, there are the nerve-communications between the two; vision is a faculty of the mind as much as of the body, and in the mental region its functions may have been obscured or suspended without the slightest interference with the physical laws of nature.

THE PROCESSIONAL COLT.

"Ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat."—Mark xi. 2.

THE closing week of our Lord's ministry was inaugurated by an event worthy of the occasion; the journey from Bethany to Jerusalem was a brilliant triumph, and for one day at least the honours of royalty are accorded by the populace to the representative of David's line. Nothing could surpass the unanimity and the enthusiasm of the public demonstration; we are naturally dazzled by its splendour, and we are carried away by admiration of the fulfilment of Zechariah's prophecy, "Behold thy King cometh unto thee, lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass" (Zech. ix. 9). Our attention is so preoccupied with these things that we omit to note the miraculous, yet there are two distinct operations here recorded, each of which requires for its achievement the exercise of divine or supernatural power. First, there is the strange and unprecedented submissiveness produced in the will of the owner of the animal, resulting in the voluntary and immediate surrender of his property; and secondly

there is another instance of almost more marvellous submissiveness produced in the animal itself, that animal being an unbroken colt, naturally a most stubborn and unmanageable creature, but suddenly reduced to absolute tameness and docility. There is also a further miraculous element in what we may term the concurrence of events. Outward human actions must have been divinely overruled in order to ensure the finding by the disciples of the ass and her colt in the way predicted and described beforehand; for to believe that the meeting of the seekers with the animals described, combined as it was with other circumstances and conditions, was the result of blind chance would require a greater stretch of credulity than belief in the miraculous itself: according to the scholastic maxim, "the world converted without a miracle would be the greatest miracle."

We have here, then, a group of no less than three incidents interwoven with one another, and each unaccountable on the ordinary rules of experience, providing us, as it were, with a cable of three strands for the moorings of our faith. Who but an oriental despot would presume to claim, or venture, to appropriate in the manner described the property of another person? The disciples are not instructed to act as persons desirous of asking a favour, but

the charge is "loose them and bring them unto me," and if anyone resists say "the Lord hath need of them." It was the message of a Lord paramount, to a vassal; such a message would have been not only resented, but scouted as the offspring of impertinence or arrogance, or perhaps simply laughed at as the act of a lunatic, unless it had been backed either by the exercise of royal prerogative or by some supernatural influence over the will of the person whose property was demanded. The former is out of the question, as Christ's kingdom was not of this world. We can only, then, conclude that the will and mind of the owner was preternaturally swayed, so as to yield up his property in a way contrary to all ordinary experience; and herein we behold human intelligence, and the tenacity of ownership obeying an exceptional command utterly opposed to their nature and education. Here is a wonder not contravening any physical law, but yet so contrary to experience that we might say of it as was said of the blind man, since the world began was it ever known for property thus to be resigned, or for one not either a king in the ordinary sense, or gifted with prerogatives higher than any earthly authority can confer, to send a message like that here recorded, "the Lord hath need of them," with any

prospect of success, or with any chance of escaping ridicule and scorn?

Not less marvellous was the control exercised over the movements and disposition of the colt, a creature in its unbroken state naturally stubborn and intractable, and of all creatures most unfit to be used on an occasion of high state or ceremony. Our attention is pointed to this circumstance by the statement appended to the instructions given to the disciples, that it was a colt "*whereon never man sat.*" But the significance of this statement seems to have escaped the notice it deserves. Expositors have remarked upon it that animals not previously used for labour were accounted especially pure and fit for sacred services, and that oxen unused to the yoke were alone selected for sacrificial purposes. But such observations are manifestly irrelevant to this case, as the colt was not selected for a sacrificial victim, but for a totally different purpose—to bear upon his back the central figure in a stately and brilliant, and, to a certain extent, tumultuous procession, on an occasion of unparalleled grandeur, in which the slightest infraction of solemnity or dignity would have produced results of the utmost incongruity. Who but one conscious of supernatural control over the headstrong and wild impulses of brute nature would

have chosen such an animal for such a purpose? Who would have ventured to challenge public observation, much less to have encountered the startling acclamations of an excited multitude, mounted on an untried, untrained quadruped? Such an action implies either a miracle in the background, or a maniac in its author, as no man in his senses would choose to encounter such a risk on such an occasion, and that too when a suitable animal was just as obtainable as one that was unsuitable. What possible motive, then, could the Saviour have had in selecting a colt "whereon never man sat," except that the discerning eye might see in the results of that selection the spirit of brute nature instantaneously transformed, and miraculously rendered submissive by supernatural power, aud that "seeing we might believe, and that believing we might have life through His name?"

THE CONCESSION OF THE GUEST-CHAMBER.

"And he will shew you a large upper room furnished and prepared."—Mark xiv. 15.

In the acquisition of a suitable guest-chamber for the solemn celebration of His last passover, our Lord exercised a similar kind of royal, we might almost say despotic authority to that which marked His appropriation of the colt. The manner in which property, or the use of property, was demanded and conceded, was analagous in the two cases, and similar comments apply to both; but the manner in which the disciple-emissaries were to be introduced to the proprietor was somewhat more strange and intricate in the latter than in the former case "Go ye into the city and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water, follow him, and wheresoever he shall go in say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith where is the guest-chamber?" Such were the very singular and circuitous directions in this instance. Such a variety of contingencies exclude the supposition of any preconcerted arrangement, private compact,

secret collusion, or plot. Apart from a miraculous overruling power directing the movements of the various persons mentioned the chances are incalculable against the right man, carrying the right signal, and belonging to the right master, being met just at the right spot at the right time. The directions were manifestly conceived, and the whole arrangement ordained and contrived to prove that Divine foreknowledge, as well as Divine power, were going to be called into operation. There was nothing here done by guess-work, nothing here left to the ordinary disposal of so-called chance, or the whole proceeding must have broken down, and have ended in confusion. Every feature and every circumstance of this marvellous errand is most wonderfully framed, so as to refute the theory of a preconcerted plan in the ordinary sense of the words, should such a mode of explanation ever be seriously entertained, for as Melvill well remarks, in an admirable discourse on this subject, "No sagacious person who had thought it worth while to make a plot at all would have made one so likely to be defeated. The supposition of anything of plot or confederacy is excluded by the commonness of the specified occurrences; and then, on the other hand, this very commonness should serve to make what must have been prophecy all the more

wonderful, for to be able to foresee, with most perfect distinctness that the man would be met, that the disciples would follow the right person, that they would be taken to the right house, that they would be shewn the right room—nay, you may speak of the marvellousness of foreseeing an empire's rise or an empire's fall, but there might really be greater scope for the keen conjecture or the sagacious guess of a far-sighted man in the probable revolution of states than in the pitcher of water, and the furnished guest-chamber." That the disciples themselves were fully convinced that their course would be guided by supernatural power, as it had been dictated by divine wisdom, is clear from the alacrity and unquestioning obedience with which they addressed themselves to the novelties of their strange errand. Had such a conviction been absent, how it must have jarred upon the feelings of men prepared in the spirit of martyrdom to follow their Master to prison or to death, to receive such apparently frivolous instructions, to be directed to go into the city and look out for a man bearing a pitcher of water; what an anti-climax to their lofty aims to receive so humble a charge as to go forth and look out in the public thoroughfare for a man of menial occupation, bearing a pitcher of water, not to mention

the numerous liabilities to error involved in the execution of such an errand, and the subsequent exposure to possible repulse, refusal, or ridicule, even in the event of the appointed guide conducting them to the person intended. "There was something that looked degrading and ignoble in such a mission," says the same eloquent preacher before quoted, "and the apparent meanness of an employment will often try faith more than its apparent difficulty; the exposure to ridicule and contempt will require greater moral nerve than exposure to danger and death. Oh, do not tell us of great faith as required only for the following Christ, bearing His cross! There was great faith required also for the following the man bearing the pitcher. Tell us not of its being a hard task to go in unto Pharaoh, and to say: "Thus saith the Lord, let my people go;" it was a hard task also to go in unto the stranger and say, "Thus saith the Master, where is the guest-chamber." But the faith of the disciples on this occasion, grounded as it was on previous experience, was fully justified by the subsequent results. The water-bearer was met, the guest-chamber was found and granted, wherein was celebrated the last supper, or rather the last passover, and the first Cæna Domini. The minds and movements of men were so wonderfully dealt with that all came

to pass exactly as foretold. We witness, therefore, in this event a twofold miracle—first, prophecy fulfilled, and secondly, men's actions guided and directed in such a way as no earthly power could accomplish. Yet, in all this, the laws of nature, of whose uniformity and inviolability the disciples of Hume's philosophy are so jealous, remain untouched. Have we not reason to say that the author of such an event, or rather train of events, "did wondrously," and shall we not have less excuse than Manaoh if we fail to perceive in such occurrences proofs of the present Deity? and if so, are we doing more than tardy justice in placing the "Finding of the Guest-chamber" on the list of miracles?

THE DREAM OF PILATE'S WIFE.

"Have thou nothing to do with that just man."—Matt. xxvii. 19

THE dream of Pilate's wife has been remarked upon by some divines as one of the most inexplicable events on record. "From whence could such a dream have proceeded?" they ask, for the spirit of evil thus to have interposed on behalf of justice and righteousness would have been for Satan to have been divided against himself: on the other hand, for such a warning to have emanated from a heavenly source would seem to imply a kind of wavering or hesitation in the counsels of the Most High, as if the great plan of redemption ordained from the foundation of the world might yet be reversed at the very last stage, and its fulfilment frustrated; as if the supremely momentous question, "The cup which my Father hath given me shall I not drink it?" might yet find some other solution beside that of the Cross. The testimony thus unconsciously yielded to the supernatural source of the dream is perfectly reasonable, whilst the perperplexity arising from its occurrence is equally unreasonable. It is quite in keeping with the

dealings of the God of Mercy to give the most incorrigible sinners warning of His purpose before He strikes a final blow. Whether they will hear or whether they will forbear, He gives notice of His intentions, so that no sinner when condemned can lay the blame on other shoulders than his own. It is a divine testimony to the liberty of human action, though we may be unable intellectually to reconcile that liberty with divine foreknowledge and predestination. Still, it is the means used by Divine wisdom to cast the responsibility of their sin upon the sinners' own heads, and to deprive them of any excuse for their wickedness, of any plea for their misconduct, save that which can never be pleaded too soon, but which may be pleaded too late: "Against thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight, that thou mightest be justified in thy saying and clear when thou art judged." Pharaoh was warned again and again, though after each warning, his heart again and again grew harder. The Nenevites were warned; they repented, and were pardoned, though afterwards they relapsed and were destroyed. Even Herod the Great was warned, for the inquiries of the Magi, and their strange unprecedented journey ought to have turned his attention to the voice of prophecy, and its approaching fulfilment, but, dreading a rival,

the warning turned to his greater condemnation, for, instead of leading him to repentance it induced him to slay the Innocents.

It is only, then, in accordance with antecedent probability that Pontius Pilate should be warned, and if the warning was without effect it only adds another instance to the mournful but multitudinous list of neglected warnings. Looking, then, at his wife's dream as a personal and opportune warning to Pilate, there is nothing in it suggestive of difficulty, on the contrary it is entirely in accordance with precedent. But, in its occurrence just at that moment, there is something so wonderful, so extraordinary, that nothing but singular obtuseness has hindered our regarding it as a miracle, and asserting it as such. Of course we are not going to assert that a dream in itself can be accounted miraculous, but, taken in combination with other events, it may become the keystone of an arch sufficiently strong to bear the weight even of a miraculous interpretation. We are profoundly ignorant of the nature of dreams. In that borderland of the spiritual world we know not how much or how little of supernatural influence may intervene. Many persons have ascribed marvellous deliverances and escapes to forebodings inspired by dreams, and it is certain that strange deeds of

darkness and of blood have had light thrown upon them, if they have not actually been detected, by the agency of dreams. Without, however, pretending to unravel the mystery as to how far, or in what cases, dreams are to be ascribed to the influence of a heated imagination, to the multitude of business, or to supernatural agency, we may take the dream of Pilate's wife as a simple fact, and then comparing it with other facts produce what must be a maze of wonder utterly baffling to the understanding, except on the principle that it is a supernaturally pre-arranged combination or group of events, in other words a miracle. If we were to come into a room and find a chessboard upon which the pieces were arranged somewhat at random, but showing the king in check, from the action of one piece, and only one, we might naturally suppose that casualty or accident left the pieces in the position they were in. If, however, two pieces combined to place the king in check, we should suppose that purpose and not chance had been at work, though perhaps we might hesitate to take an oath that such had been the case; but if three pieces were all concentrated on the position in question, we should be morally certain that skilled intellectual agents had left the pieces where they were; we should entertain no doubt on the

subject; we should account him an idiot who could not argue backwards from effect to cause, and we should not hesitate, if serving on a jury, to condemn a fellow-creature to death, if being accused of murder, the testimony against him were equally strong. Evidence of no less tenacity binds up in one bundle of associated facts the dream of Pilate's wife with surrounding events, and if we refuse to ascribe it to a supernatural source, it makes a demand upon our credulity far greater than the miracle itself. The dream, be it remembered, did not occur at the usual time of dreaming, viz. in the night time. Jesus already "stood before the governor," and the governor was set down on the judgment seat before the message from his wife arrived, and the message was "I have suffered many things this day in a dream." Here, then, is a day dream exactly coinciding in time with the proceedings of the judicial court. Sufficiently early, but not too early, to stand in arrest of judgment. But who was Pilate's wife that she should be interested in these proceedings? A Roman matron would not be addicted to interfere with her husband's judicial business on any occasion, much less when the person inculpated was one of an alien and despised race. Pilate himself scorned the imputation of knowing anything about the

Jews or their customs, asking contemptuously, "Am I a Jew?" His wife, then, would have been very different from other Roman matrons if she had mixed herself up with the political or religious sentiments of a subject race, or had felt any interest in the acquittal or condemnation of a solitary member of that race, who, for ought she knew, might have been a dangerous demagogue or a mischievous agitator; but, isolated and entirely apart as she would naturally stand from Jews, their prophecies and their customs, she not only has this remarkable dream at a most remarkable moment, but she fixes upon one of our Lord's prophetic titles in the message which conveys her warning, "Have thou nothing to do with that just man." The same Person who had just fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah, "Rejoice greatly O daughter of Zion, shout O daughter of Jerusalem, behold thy king cometh unto thee: HE IS JUST, and having salvation, lowly, and riding upon an ass and upon a colt the foal of an ass."

Here are three remarkable circumstances—1st, a dream in the daytime, experienced by a person totally disconnected with the subject of it; a stranger, by education and habit, to the accusation and the accused, living apart from all the interests involved, having no ostensible concern either

with Jesus of Nazareth or the result of His trial.

2nd. This dream is coincident in time with the opening of the proceedings before the judgment seat.

3rd. A stranger to Jewish ideas and Messianic prophecies pitches upon one of the leading titles whereby that Messiah is designated in prophecy.

Any one of these circumstances might be a weak argument in favour of miraculous agency, but taken in combination they form that threefold cord which is not quickly broken.

CONCLUSION.

We live in days when the world moves fast, not only in bodily locomotion but in mental transition from one set of ideas to another. Old theories are wiped out, and new ones crop up with mushroom growth. Novelties become antiquities, not from the lapse of time, but from the rapid revolution of thought.

In Germany, we are told, Paulus is now repudiated, and Strauss entirely out of date, and the mythical interpretation of miracles, as advocated by Schenkel, is now the latest fashion. According to this, all miracles are the invention or offsprlng of a fervid imagination, mental creations emanating, it is condescendingly allowed, not so much from a fraudulent purpose as from an irresistible poetic impulse, but all the same equally false in fact.

"Such things," says the writer above named, "did not really happen; they are the inventions of a pious imagination, which, under the influence of a childlike religiousness, clothed the supernatural power of spirit, more especially of the Divine Spirit, in the form of sensible facts. In this way

has arisen the pious legend, the so-called myth, which is not the arbitrary or sectarian invention of individuals, but the involuntary natural product of the religious spirit of mankind." The Divine contriver of the foregoing miracles might have anticipated such a phase of opinion, and have framed them so that they should by internal evidence alone refute such an hypothesis. Though a heated imagination might feign that the object of its adoration had raised the dead or walked upon the sea, it would never construct a narrative like that of the Finding of the Guest-chamber, or find scope for its employment in ordinary every-day events, such as the casual interview with a woman by a well-side, or in the movements of a detachment of police. An excited imagination craves after display, and imports into its fabrications a large measure of that element. But here are miracles conducted for the most part in a manner totally devoid of display, which only prove themselves miracles by their wonderful combination of the ordinary events of every-day life. No violence is done to nature; her laws remain intact, and armed with such proofs we may retort upon the modern physical philosopher who contemptuously speaks of "theological fogs," that our first principles are more definite and certain, the foundations of our

belief more solid than his, who frankly avows that his mind continually oscillates between biogenesis and abiogenesis for want of more certain and accurate first principles in the region of his scientific inquiries—we refer, of course, to Professor Huxley's inaugural address to the last congress of the British Association.

Physical philosophers may find their time too much engaged in solving the mysteries of Darwinism, or spectrum analysis, to bestow much thought on religion, but that old-fashioned subject still has a share, and a very considerable share, of public attention; and old as the world is, it must be much older before theology has become an extinct study, or its literature has become a dead language. Men will never cease to take an interest in miracles, to be thankful for the evidence they afford of a superintending Providence, and of a future state of reward and punishment; nor will they, we may confidently assert, willingly let die a sound argument in their favour. For, after all, what is so ready a proof that God interferes in the affairs of men as a miracle? What is so solid an argument in favour of religion, or of the re-binding, for that is the meaning of the word, of the broken connexion between man and his Maker, as a miracle? Were it not that miracles form so important a bulwark in

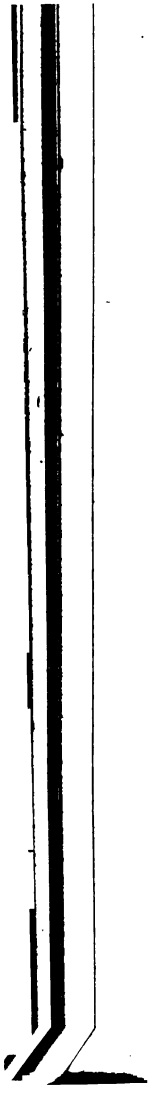
the defence of the Christian religion, why would they be so fiercely assailed?

We see honourable men carried away in the heat of argument beyond the bounds of veracity, and young readers should be put on their guard against taking any statement entirely on trust, since even quotations, when accompanied by chapter and verse, may be made vehicles of falsehood; thus, for example, Baden Powell has the hardihood to assert that Hume's argument on miracles was upheld and advocated by Dr. Johnson, and then he puts in quotation marks the following words, as though these were a literal and faithful extract from Boswell's life of that great man: "Why, Sir, Hume taking the proposition simply is right; but the Christian revelation is not proved by miracles alone, but as connected with prophecies, and with the doctrines in confirmation of which miracles were wrought." Such are the words foisted upon the world as a genuine quotation, and any inexperienced reader, glancing at the first sentence, "Why, Sir, Hume taking the proposition simply is right," would carry away the impression that so great a philosopher as Dr. Johnson considered Hume's argument sound, and sanctioned it by his high authority, whereas what Dr. Johnson really did say was this: "Why Sir, the great difficulty

of proving miracles should make us very cautious in believing them. But let us consider: although God has made nature to operate by certain fixed laws, yet it is not unreasonable to think that he may suspend those laws in order to establish a system highly advantageous to mankind. Now the Christian religion is a most beneficial system as it gives us light and certainty, where we were before in darkness and doubt; the miracles which prove it are attested by men who had no interest in deceiving us, but who, on the contrary, were told that they should suffer persecution, and did actually lay down their lives in confirmation of the truth of the facts which they asserted." Nothing can be conceived more opposed than the sentiments of Dr. Johnson, and the doctrine of Hume, and yet we see how, by a false quotation, the authority of the one may be claimed in support of the other. To such unscrupulous measures men will resort when writing under the influence of partisanship.

But, if the foregoing selection from the pages of the New Testament has convinced us that there may be miracles without any violation of the so-called fixed laws of nature, the argument of Hume can no longer be cast in our teeth; and it matters comparatively little whether it be true or false; we have gained a solid foothold as Christian

advocates, and from an unassailable position we may claim the attention even of the most careless to the evidences upon which we build, and we may selemnly call on doubtful or mistrustful minds to pause and reflect before they wantonly reject even the physical miracles. The authorship both of the metaphysical and the physical miracles is one and the same, hence, if the former are true the latter are. We may not as yet have discovered the right clue to their interpretation, but if it baffles our understanding, how they are to be reconciled with the inviolate uniformity of nature's laws, may we not be content, on so abstruse a matter, to know for the present at least in part, and only in part, waiting in faithful expectation for the time when that which is perfect shall come, believing that there may be a solution which as yet we have never arrived at, and perhaps never shall arrive at until we pass behind that veil which "no mortal hand has ever lifted."



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